DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 138 565 SP 010 991

AUTHOR Barber, Larry W.
TITLE The Need for Research In Schools.
PUB DATE Apr 77
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting, Division H, American Educational Research Association (New York, New York, April 4-8, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Action Research; *Classroom Research; *College School Cooperation; Data Collection; *Information Networks; Operations Research; *Organizational Development; *Research Needs; Research Utilization

ABSTRACT

A clear and present need exists for research in schools leading to defensible, reliable objective data for decision-making, as opposed to research on schools, which is generally limited to experimental methodology leading to "general truths." Reasons for an increasing need for in-school research are: (1) an increasingly sophisticated public demand for data generated from operational research; (2) an increasingly tight fiscal situation, requiring decision-making based on hard, operational data; (3) the demand by teachers for research and evaluations of effectiveness of inclass innovations they initiate. If the university-based research community is to collaborate in fulfilling this need, it must support a number of changes in the present system including: (1) reallocation of federal research monies toward in-school research conducted by university-based researchers in collaboration with local school personnel on school-generated topics; (2) development of a communications network linking all facets of in-school research; (3) development of means to translate theoretical educational research into functionally applicable terms; and (4) provision of school administrator and board member inservice training programs in techniques for utilizing research results. Prospects for the establishment of an effective in-school research effort seem bleak, but the need exists, the task is there. It remains to develop the delivery vehicle for fulfilling those needs. (MB)

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THE NEED FOR RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

Larry W. Barber
Eugene Public Schools

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Division H, American Educational Research Association, New York City, New York, April 4-8, 1977

The most important, and probably most influential, group of people in the country today who could provide needed assistance in the development on intelligent systemic change in public schools are university based researchers, evaluators and developers. These are the people who have the time, resources, interest, training and institutional backing to conduct research so badly needed by public schools. They are the ones working in a system that should support the conduct of basic research, policy research, and practical field based research that will provide information to public school administrators, boards and teachers. [illegible] you, we are not suggesting that basic research be replaced by operational research in schools - we are, and have been, suggesting that only 25% of the current brainpower time and resources be reallocated to research in schools on current school problems. The big problem is that we feel most university based researchers hardly do any of that. The reason that they do not perform the research we need done is not that they don't have the skills but because the reward system for advancement and tenure in the university precludes the possiblilty of engaging in research that cannot be published in refereed journals. These journals are seldom interested in publishing research we need done and we are seldom interested in research that is selected for publication in these journals. Over the past few years there has been a significant increase in the development of research and evaluation units in public schools. There were approximately 80 such units in 1970 and we believe that there are now almost 500 units in 1977. Consequently, there is increased competition for the federal educational research dollar primarily because the university researcher refused to perform research needed by the ultimate educational consumer - public schools.

Increased competition for the federal dollar also arises in the form of the private research and evaluation companies. There are, reputedly, more than 250 in the Washington, D.C. area alone. In 1974, 1975 and 1976, these firms were awarded significant amounts of NIE funds (NIE Fact Book). The presence of so many private firms coupled with the government's increased devotion to the RFP indicates a further reduction in the research dollar to university and public school based researchers alike.

Of course there are the big federal labs and centers and the state departments of education. These are the folks we should observe more closely. They have gained the lion's share of the research and development dollars. How they do this is an old time tried and effective method that is the embodiment

of the American way, a sort of teapot dome, pork barrel methodology packaged neatly in a modern day carpetbag. Simply, they use federal dollars to support highly paid and efficient lobbying efforts to get more federal dollars. It's nothing to get worked up over, any student of political science will point out that it works and that it has always worked. What I suggest is that we, public school and university based researchers/evaluators, recognize that and form our own lobbies. Joint efforts to study current educational problems and issues, to generate answers to our separate problems and collaborate as much as possible where collaboration to resolve issues is a necessity. The humorous part of all of this is that we are all competing for crumbs. Given the size of the national expenditure for education, the amount allocated for research to better education is, at best, ludicrous. Joint efforts and collaboration could be directed to increase these monies and to increase the efficiency of the expenditure of current existing monies.

There is a clear present and increasing need for research in schools where increasing federal dollars for research are clearly needed. I want to stress research in schools and school districts as opposed to research on schools. Richard Schaltz stated it best in his May ER editorial, "Academic research on schools differs from operational research in schools. The difference lies not in methodology or merit but in context and communication... Although academic research on schools and operational research in schools can in principal be conducted from the locus of either a school or extraschool agency, in practice operational research is typically an intraschool agency initiative while academic research is an extraschool agency initiative."

Research on schools, school programs and procedures is generally considered as basic academic research relatively limited to experimental methodology with an experimental and control group, testing a hypothesis leaving one variable free to vary is long range and costly. Research in schools is considered operational, administrative, non-theory oriented, short range, quick, dirty and topically oriented. The methodology is usually the same, extreme rigor in sampling, gathering and analyzing data, etc. The purpose is very different; the first, basic research, is considered a search for truth, the second, a search for defensible, objective, reliable data for decision making.

One of the major reasons for an increasing need for research in schools is due to an increased sophisticated public demand for data generated from operational research. Fifteen years ago the public said, "Educator, you run the

schools and do good things for children, we trust you." Ten years ago, they started saying, "Educator, you should be accountable for what you are doing and are not doing." Five years ago they said, "We want to talk with you about decisions you make before they are made." Now they are saying, "We want to participate in all the decisions you make and assist you in making them - predicated on the data. We no longer care about your professional opinion and judgement, we want data and we will judge the merit of your ideas on that data." Because of this demand and because most public school administrators and board members are untrained to deal with data-based decision systems, they have hired internal data capabilities for operational research and evaluation and will continue to do so at an increasing rate.

Student populations are dropping in most districts, yet because of inflation school budgets are increasing. Consequently, dollars are tighter and boards are more concerned with getting what they pay for. Internal operational units are funded and staffed because they provide needed data on time for crucial decisions. They are maintained and on the increase because the data they provide is to the point, credible, objective, and increases the frequency of correct decisions.

Another reason for additional research in schools is the expectation/demand from teachers to conduct research and evaluations of effectiveness of in-classroom innovations teachers initiate. They expect assistance in what they want done and are less likely to further tolerate what some outside researchers want to do. These various demands for an increase in research in schools have produced at least two interesting side effects. The first has a positive effect on the profession of educational research and evaluation. The presence of intra-agency research generated data creates in those agencies an alternative decision making system. Instead of a purely political "he who screams the loudest and has the greatest clout gets what he wants" system, a more objective, credible, and defensive system emerges and with it an increasing respect for research and data. A negative side effect is a growing schism between public school personnel and academics - predicated on money. The logic goes something like this, "Why should school systems support academic research when we are paying for our own inhouse research which provides us with the data we want and need?" A question that academics are going to have to provide acceptable answers to in the very near future. The interesting issue is that in that near future the sum of monies spent by public schools for "research" will far surpass the money spent by the feds if that is not already the case. In addition, the perception of local boards and superintendents is that money spent inhouse buys more of what they need. A

case in point is Eugene, Oregon, where $264,000 produced 88 documents/products in a little over one year; where half of those brought about board action or policy change, administrative action or procedural change. That same $264,000, if contracted outside, would have produced no more than 25 to 30 products and in a high proportion of cases, these products would not have been completed in time for board decisions.

If larger scale university/public school collaborative research efforts are to occur to promote further needed research in schools, then a number of changes in the present system must occur. The following are a few suggestions for those changes:

(A) A respectable reallocation of federal educational research monies should be dedicated to research in schools conducted by university based researchers in collaboration with local school personnel working on school generated researchable topics.

(B) A federal agency with a national scope of operations, such as NIE or a lab or center, should develop a communications network in cooperation with AERA and other educational research agencies to establish 1) a more formal communications system among research and evaluation staffs in schools and university personnel interested in conducting research in schools, 2) establish a clearinghouse for materials, personnel, procedures and products for research and evaluation application in schools, 3) establish a forum for discussion of issues, problems and solutions relevant to inschool research and evaluation efforts, 4) identify successful research/evaluation products in schools and disseminate them to other schools with similar needs, 5) make available to schools and communities well trained, experienced researchers/evaluators to assist in establishing new research and evaluation efforts or to assist in problem solving activities for established operations.

In addition, significant retraining efforts must occur to 1) retool university based educational researchers to translate the results of educational research activities to public school personnel or to develop a new role of translator who can perform this function, and 2) provide inservice training programs for public school administrators and board members that will provide them assistance in utilizing the results of educational research and evaluation activities.

The most logical choice of an agency to initiate change, to produce collaboration, to generate functional procedures for more quality research in schools, to initiate communication and dissemination systems, and to provide the needed training programs is, of course, the National Institute of Education. From the very first few months of the existence of NIE until today, many of us in public school research and evaluation positions have tried to work with NIE to communicate the importance of these functions they could/should serve. We have written proposals, attended meetings, written letters, and met with their governing body, the National Research Council - all in an attempt to be heard, which was to no avail. My personal conclusions, as of April 1977, is that NIE simply does not give a damn about public schools or the importance of research in them. The existence of NIE is dependent upon a political alliance with labs, centers and state departments of education and their purpose is similar to a job corps function, simply to keep a few researchers employed.

The outlook then seems very bleak. The need for university/public school research collaboration exists but the vehicle does not. A most important task is to initiate an agency, preferably a private, profit making one, whose function is to generate this collaboration and use a part of the profit to lobby for additional research dollars to develop an educational research system that works.